BOOK REVIEW

Sivasagar Natya Samajar Itivritta (In Assamese) by *Sahajananda Bharali*, Published by the author; Happy Villa, Ujan Bazar, Gauhati-3. pp. 282; numerous illustrations, Rs. 15.

Sibsagar, was an ancient capital town of the medieval Ahom kings at the North-Eastern region of Assam. The picturesque old city retained its tradition in almost all spheres of life; educational, and cultural including art, literature, music, dance and drama. Nearly eighty years back was established there a Dramatic Club with its own stage, built in the western style and it was known as Sibsagar Natya Samaj. The first Bengali Public Stage was built in Calcutta little more than 108 years ago and if we consider in this background that the Sibsagar Natya Samaj was established 80 years ago its importance is easily realized. I think it is the oldest stage built outside Calcutta in those days and moreover it has maintained its continued existence full of life and activities throughout eight decades, in a far off area in distant Assam. It is very fortunate that we have a continued history of this stage for this long period of time, written by a very distinguished and active member of the Natya Samaj, on thorough study and research, with the original documents maintained by the stage and personal experience of the author himself gained before its footlight.

The author of the book under review as an active member of the Dramatic Club had taken part in various dramatic performances in various roles practically upto his advanced age when he had devoted himself to fulfil the task of writing this valuable history. Therefore, what the author has written in his book is a record of his personal experiences. As a matter of fact in the above book we find a comprehensive history of development of cultural life of the people of Sibsagar, for the last eighty years. Because the Sibsagar Natya Samaj has shown how a dramatic club can be the nucleus of development of activities of cultural life of an intellectual people. It also shows how it can extend its activities towards different aspects of culture with its basis in dramatic performances. Or in other words it shows how stage and drama are integrated into the social life of a people.

The book had been published on the occasion of the celebration of the Platinum Jubilee of the Dramatic club. This has been a very good idea that instead of spending the entire amount of money collected on festive items only, the author of the book has done a permanent service to his club by

publishing this valuable document of its past activities of the last 3 quarters of a century, in such a beautiful illustrated, nicely printed and decently bound volume, for permanent preservation in private and public libraries.

The details he has given are interesting and attractive to not only local readers but to anybody who is generally interested in culture as a whole. It has been written by a person who knows the subject from within and not by anybody from outside. The author has given a good indication and if identical efforts are made from the different regions of India, we can easily get a National History of Indian Stage and Drama by joining all the volumes together.

Asutosh Bhattacharya